The Naked Truth About Clothing Waste

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Agenda

1) Overview of apparel and textiles’ impact on the waste stream

2) How King County and City of Seattle’s Threadcycle program is addressing end-of-life clothing and textiles

3) A spotlight on our recent work on clothing waste prevention
Climate Change Impacts From Clothing Production

• In 2015, emissions from polyester production equaled the annual emissions of 185 coal-fired power plants.
• Apparel & footwear industries account for 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
It takes 2,700 liters of water to make 1 cotton shirt, equal to the amount of water 1 person drinks in 2.5 years.

3,781 liters of water are used over the lifetime of 1 pair of Levi’s 501 jeans.
The average American throws away 68+ pounds of clothing and textiles per year.

From 2000 to 2014, textiles increased 71% in the municipal waste stream.
Locally, there are about 35,970 tons of textiles in the King County & Seattle annual waste streams combined.

Nationally, from 2010-2014, textile diversion rates remained stagnant, at round 15%.
Local Efforts

King County Solid Waste Division & Seattle Public Utilities conducted research and outreach that identified “low hanging fruit”:

• Damaged textiles (ripped/stained)
• Orphan items (single socks, shoes, etc.)
Local Efforts

Threadcycle
Give *all* your clothes, shoes and linens for reuse or recycling

Big Brothers Big Sisters
Puget Sound

Goodwill
Because jobs change lives

Northwest Center
People of all abilities

The Salvation Army

TexGreen
Clothes Recycling

usagain
Use it again

Value Village
In the U.S., only 10-20% of donated items are re-sold locally by retailers and charitable organizations.

Since 2014, the number of countries that ban or regulate used clothing imports has more than doubled.
China accounts for 30% of world apparel exports.

U.S. purchases 1 billion garments from China annually.

Used clothes from U.S. thrift markets MORE EXPENSIVE THAN New clothes from China.
Recycling Isn’t Enough

FAST FASHION: New styles at low cost, with 52 micro-seasons per year and a new trend out every week.

GOAL: Buy as many garments as possible, as quickly as possible.

OPPORTUNITY: Come together and focus on the need to cut consumption and prevent waste in the first place.
Environmental, Economic & Social Benefits

• Reduction in energy consumption and GHG emissions
• Conservation of natural resources
• Reduction in pesticides and toxics from clothing production
• Increase in jobs or economic development
• Building community and a sense of social connection; human well-being
• Increasing residents’ financial security
• Increasing equity through fair trade and non-sweatshop labor
Consumer-Focused Clothing Waste Prevention

• Buy only the clothing you need and buy clothes that last
• Extend the life of your clothing by:
  • Caring for clothing
  • Repairing
  • Repurposing
  • Refashioning clothes and/or buying refashioned clothes
  • Renting or leasing clothes
  • Sharing through informal networks
  • Reusing clothes (buy secondhand, use hand-me-downs, localized swaps)
Understanding Existing Models & Programs

Research focused on:

• Industry efforts
• Government initiatives (US & Abroad)
• Non-profit models
• Academic study
Brand Efforts

RENEW + REMAKE

Worn Wear Swap
Black Friday

patagonia

DON’T BUY
THIS JACKET

RENT THE RUNWAY
love. wear. return.
Association & Entrepreneurial Efforts

Sustainable Apparel Coalition

RW The Renewal Workshop

Coyuchi

Sword & Plough

Lease Jeans

King County Public Utilities
Community, Government, & NGO Efforts

DEQ
State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality

MAKE EVERY THREAD COUNT.
Learn More

wrap
Stakeholder Interviews
Key Themes

1) Profit & Scalability
2) Segmentation
3) Inclusivity & Intersectionality
4) Economic Development & Policy
5) Metrics
Profit & Scalability

How does clothing waste prevention impact businesses’ bottom line?

How can waste prevention approaches be scaled from pilot to broad implementation?

What makes an approach scalable?
Segmentation

How are audiences targeted and selected?

What demographic information is leveraged?

What messages are used?

What specific behaviors are being addressed?
Inclusivity & Intersectionality

How are different groups affected by clothing waste prevention?

How do we ensure all perspectives, including social and economic concerns, are equitably addressed and included in the conversation?
What policy, legal, or financial tools can be leveraged to support clothing waste prevention?
How do we measure clothing waste prevention?

How do we measure success and/or create metrics to hold participants accountable?
Big Questions

- Is it better to join a program or create a new one?
- Which partners allow the greatest opportunity to leverage change?
- Who are the “unlikely” partners to bring into the conversation?
- Would it be useful to reframe the whole clothing waste prevention conversation?
- What metrics do we create and track?
- And, what criteria do we use to measure success?
Is it better to change your mind than to change your clothes?
Additional Resources

• **Clothing Waste Prevention: Selected research results for reducing clothing waste by consumers**
• **Threadcycle website**
• **Post-Consumer Textiles Value Chain**

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